DC
MINI-SERIES 1 OF 3
TO TEMPT THE GODS
MASTERS
OF THE UNIVERSE
ALL NEW!
60¢
NO. 1
DEC.
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
TUSKA & GIORDANO

HE-MAN...BATTLE CAT...MAN-AT-ARMS...TEELA...STRATOS...THEY ARE AMONG THE MIGHTIEST HEROES ON A WORLD WHERE SCIENCE AND MAGIC MELD TO FORM HEROES AND VILLAINS UNIMAGINED BY US. THEY ARE THE...
MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE
"TO TEMPT THE GODS!"
BEGINNING ...AN EPIC ADVENTURE THROUGH TIME, SPACE--AND EVIL!
J-8400

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THIS IS ETERNIA.
DON'T BE FOOLED BY ITS APPEARANCE, THOUGH. BENEATH THIS RATHER MEDIEVAL EXTERIOR LIES A WORLD WHOSE TECHNOLOGY OUTSTRIPS THAT OF EVEN EARTH'S.
OF COURSE, THE VAST MAJORITY OF ETERNIANS WOULD BE BAFFLED BY THE COMPARISON WITH OUR WORLD, EXISTING AS IT DOES ON A DIMENSIONAL PLANE FAR REMOVED FROM THEM.
BUT THEN, THAT WOULD EXPLAIN WHY LIFE ON THIS WORLD IS SO VERY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE KNOW...
TO THE QUEEN...LONG MAY SHE RULE!
THE ROYAL FETE IS QUITE A SUCCESS, YOUR MAJESTY. THE MEMBERS OF THE COURT SEEM TO BE ENJOYING THEMSELVES MOST HEARTILY.
AYE, GOOD SQUIRE. FOR WHO AMONG US DOES NOT WISH TO SHOW OUR LOVE FOR THE QUEEN, MY WIFE?
GOOD DAY TO YOU, MAJESTY. AND WHERE IS YOUR HEIR, PRINCE ADAM, ON THIS DAY OF FESTIVITIES?
BY THE GODS--YOU MEAN HE IS NOT WITH YOU, MAN-AT-ARMS?!
OH, THAT BOY SURELY TAXES MY PATIENCE. HE KNEW WELL HE WAS TO BE IN ATTENDANCE!
BAH! WE MIGHT BOTH HAVE KNOWN BETTER, YOUR HIGHNESS. SINCE WHEN HAVE WE EVER KNOWN THE PRINCE TO SHOW THE SLIGHTEST RESPONSIBILITY TO HIS ROYAL DUTIES?
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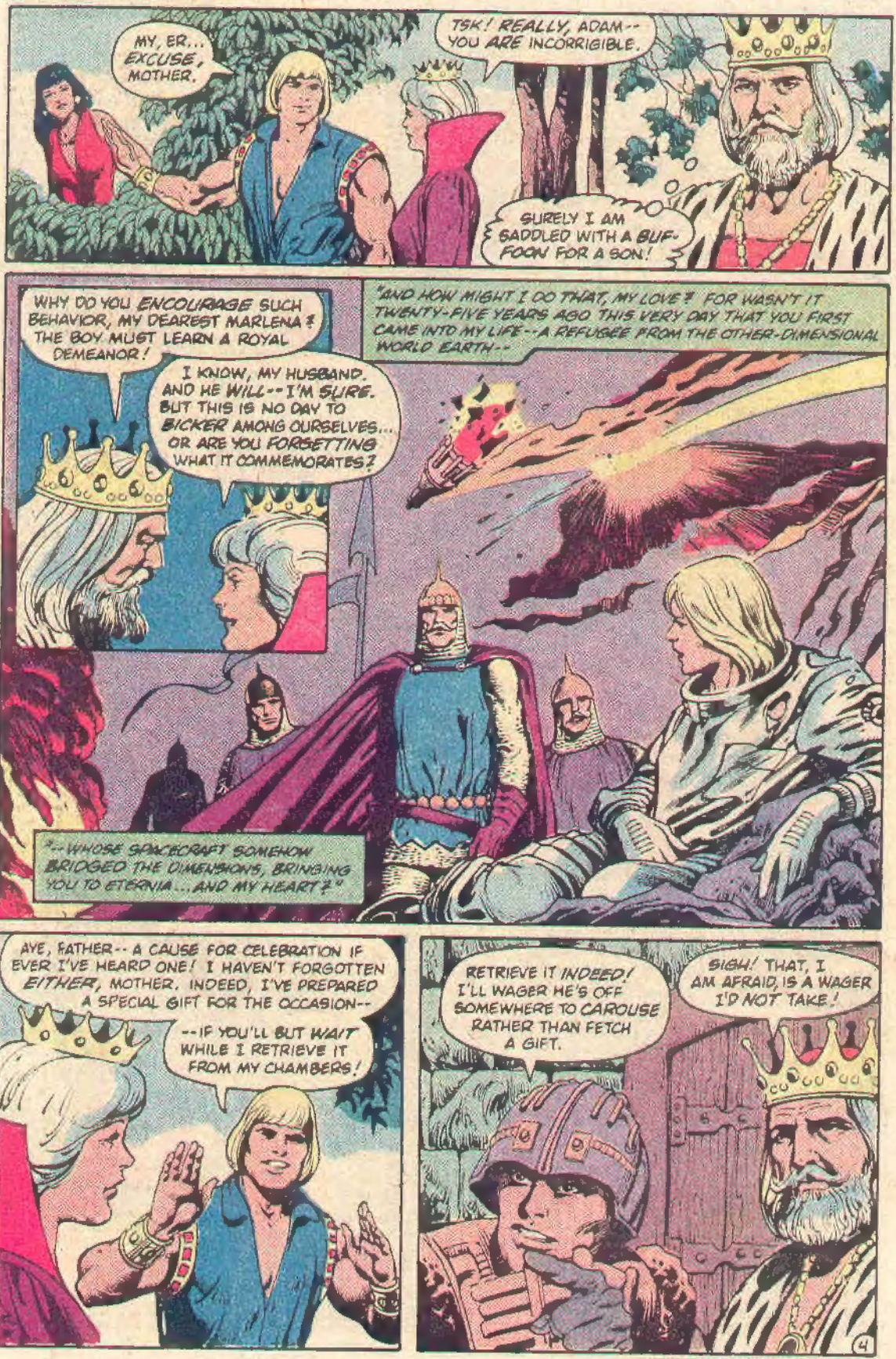
IRRESPONSIBLE, GOOD MENTOR? WHEN HAVE I EVER FAILED YOU?
WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, BOY?! WAS NOT YOUR PRESENCE COMMANDED HERE?
DON'T "MENTOR" ME, BOY! YOU DO MY TALENTS A DISSERVICE BY THE TITLE, AND AS FOR FAILING ME, I WOULDN'T WASTE THE HOURS IT WOULD TAKE TO LIST ALL THE OCCASIONS.
CALM YOURSELF, FATHER. I'M HERE, AFTER ALL. WHEN HAVE YOU EVER KNOWN ME TO MISS A PARTY--ESPECIALLY ONE HONORING MY MOTHER?
YOU DO THIS INTENTIONALLY TO VEX ME, DON'T YOU, BOY?
TO VEX US ALL, MY KING. YOU DON'T KNOW HOW I'VE TRIED TO CHANGE HIS WAYS, TO MAKE HIM ACT MORE AS THE HEIR TO THE THRONE SHOULD.
I DO NOT BLAME YOUR EFFORTS, GOOD MAN-AT-ARMS. NOR CAN I UNDERSTAND HOW ANY SON OF MINE COULD HAVE TURNED OUT THUSLY.
OH, HUSH, BOTH OF YOU! YOU'RE TOO HARD ON THE LAD. I'M SURE HE HAS GOOD REASON FOR BEING LATE.
TEE-HEE. OH, ADAM...
...ARE YOU NOT GOING TO COME BACK TO ME? TEE-HEE!
ER...NOT NOW, WOMAN...
3


MY, ER... EXCUSE, MOTHER.
TSK! REALLY, ADAM-- YOU ARE INCORRIGIBLE.
SURELY I AM SADDLED WITH A BUFFOON FOR A SON!
WHY DO YOU ENCOURAGE SUCH BEHAVIOR, MY DEAREST MARLENA? THE BOY MUST LEARN A ROYAL DEMEANOR!
I KNOW, MY HUSBAND, AND HE WILL-- I'M SURE. BUT THIS IS NO DAY TO BICKER AMONG OURSELVES... OR ARE YOU FORSETTING WHAT IT COMMEMORATES?
"AND HOW MIGHT I DO THAT, MY LOVE? FOR WASN'T IT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO THIS VERY DAY THAT YOU FIRST CAME INTO MY LIFE-- A REFUGEE FROM THE OTHER-DIMENSIONAL WORLD EARTH--
"--WHOSE SPACECRAFT SOMEHOW BRIDGED THE DIMENSIONS, BRINGING YOU TO ETERNIA... AND MY HEART?"
AYE, FATHER-- A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION IF EVER I'VE HEARD ONE! I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN EITHER, MOTHER. INDEED, I'VE PREPARED A SPECIAL GIFT FOR THE OCCASION--
--IF YOU'LL BUT WAIT WHILE I RETRIEVE IT FROM MY CHAMBERS!
RETRIEVE IT INDEED! I'LL WAGER HE'S OFF SOMEWHERE TO CAROUSE RATHER THAN FETCH A GIFT.
SIGH! THAT, I AM AFRAID, IS A WAGER I'D NOT TAKE!
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SOMETIMES I WISH IT WEREN'T NECESSARY TO CAUSE MY FATHER SUCH GRIEF, YET WHAT STARTED OUT AS ADOLESCENT REBELLION, MUST FOR NOW REMAIN AS THE PERSONALITY OF PRINCE ADAM.
BWOOMPH
BY THE DARK GODS! WHAT MANNER OF SORCERY IS THIS?
MY VERY CHAMBERS REVERBERATE WITH POWER UNIMAGINED...AND WHAT OF GOOD CRINGER, WHO LAST I SAW SLUMBERING WITHIN?! I...
GOODESS! DEMONS AND MONSTROSITIES FROM HELL... ATTACKING ME!
THE STENCH OF FOUL BRIMSTONE LIES HEAVY ON THE AIR! I MUST TAKE REFUGE... EVEN IN SUCH AN IGNOBLE PLACE AS BENEATH MY BED.
CRINGER! THANK THE FATES YOU'RE UNHARMED, FAITHFUL CAT. WHAT TRANSPIRES HERE?
UNHARMED MY PRINCE?! MY POOR FUR WAS SINGED BEYOND HOPE.
FWOOSH
GROAN! I THOUGHT I MIGHT FIND SOME PEACE HERE...BUT HOW WAS I TO KNOW EVIL SKELETOR WOULD CHOOSE TO MAKE HIS FOUL PRESENCE KNOWN IN THIS OF ALL PLACES...?
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SKELETOR! THE VERY MENTION OF HIS NAME CAUSES THE YOUNG PRINCE'S BLOOD TO RUN COLD...BUT ALSO DOES IT CAUSE THE FACADE OF INNOCENCE TO INSTANTLY DROP AWAY AND ACTION TO REPLACE IT...
MAKE HASTE, CRINGER! THOUGH WE'VE RECEIVED NO SUMMONS FROM THE GODDESS TO WARN US OF THIS DANGER, SURELY SHE HAS NEED OF OUR SERVICES WITHIN THE CAVERN OF POWER!
MOAN! WHY CAN I NEVER HAVE SOME PEACE...?
THE CAVERN IS DARK AND SILENT--UNTIL THESE TWO CROSS ITS THRESHOLD. THEN, POWER ERUPTS FROM ITS INTERIOR, BATHING ADAM AND CRINGER IN ITS GLOW--
--BRINGING FORTH THE WARRIOR HE-MAN AND THE SAVAGE BATTLE CAT!
WHA?..?! WHO DARES PROFANE THIS SACRED PLACE WITH SUCH FOUL, MOCKING LAUGHTER?
HA HA HA HA
WHO DO YOU THINK WOULD DARE, SIMPLETON--
--BUT THE MIGHTY SKELETOR! HA HA HA!
RRROAR! DEMON... YOU WILL FEEL THE TALONS OF BATTLE CAT FOR THIS...!
6

HOLD YOUR WRATH, FAITHFUL CAT!
WE DARE NOT ATTACK TILL WE LEARN WHY HE AWAITS HERE INSTEAD OF THE GODDESS!
YOU'LL NOT FIND YOUR PRECIOUS GODDESS HERE, HERO--
YOUR FOUL TONGUE FORMS LIES AS EVER, DEMON! THE GODDESS IS FAR TOO POWERFUL FOR EVEN ONE OF YOUR ILK TO SEIZE HER AGAINST HER WISHES.
NOR SHALL YOU E'ER SEE HER AGAIN... IF SKELETOR HAS HIS WILL THIS DAY!
I SHALL WARN YOU BUT ONCE, EVIL ONE--SPEAK TO ME THE TRUTH 'ERE MY BATTLE AXE FINDS A PLACE TO REST 'TWIXT YOUR FOUL EYES!
I'VE NO NEED FOR DECEPTIONS THIS DAY, HE-MAN ...THE GODDESS IS INDEED IN MY GRASP--JUST AS SOON SHALL BE THE WALLS AND MIGHT OF CASTLE GREYSKULL AND THE KEY TO ITS TAKING--THE POWER SWORD!
IS THERE ONE ON THIS PITIFUL WORLD WHO KNOWS NOT THAT HE WHO BREECHES THE WALLS OF THE GREAT CASTLE WILL HOLD SWAY O'ER ALL OF ETERNIA AS ITS KING?
I'M NO SCHOOLBOY WHO NEEDS TO BE TOLD OF MY PLANET'S ANCIENT LEGENDS, CREATURE FROM HELL--NOR DO I NEED REMINDING THAT SINCE YOUR ARRIVAL ON OUR PLANET YOU'VE SOUGHT DOMINATION!
THEN YOU KNOW TOO, THAT THE GODDESS WAS LONG AGO CHARGED WITH WATCHING OVER THE TWIN-HALVES OF THE POWER SWORD, TO SEE THEM SAFE UNTIL THE TRUE KING OF ETERNIA CAME FORTH TO CLAIM THEM AS HIS RIGHT.
BEHOLD THE IMAGE OF MY CAPTIVE, HE-MAN!
7

LONG DID IT TAKE ME TO KNOW THAT I WOULD NEVER MYSELF BE ABLE TO TAKE THE SWORDS, EITHER BY CUNNING OR MAGIC, FOR THAT IS A RIGHT OPEN ONLY TO THE FUTURE KING...OR ONE WHO IS PURE OF SOUL!
THAT IS WHY YOU SHALL DO MY BIDDING FOR ME, CHAMPION! HA HA!
NEVER, DEMON! BETTER I SHOULD DIE THAN SERVE YOUR EVIL END!
I KNOW WELL YOUR LIFE MEANS NAUGHT TO YOU IN DEFENSE OF ETERNIA, FOOL--BUT WHAT OF THE LIFE OF YOUR GODDESS? HA HA!
"KNOW YOU THAT I CAME THIS DAY TO THE CAVERN TO AGAIN ATTEMPT TO WREST THE SECOND HALF OF THE SWORD THAT FOREVER EVADES MY GRASP FROM HER PROTECTION--
"--BUT AS ALWAYS, SHE WAS DEFIANT! NEITHER WORDS NOR THREATS COULD MAKE HER REVEAL TO ME ITS LOCATION--
"--FOR HER MAGIC IS NEAR MY OWN IN ITS MIGHT! SHE DID USE ALL AT HER DISPOSAL TO THWART ME--
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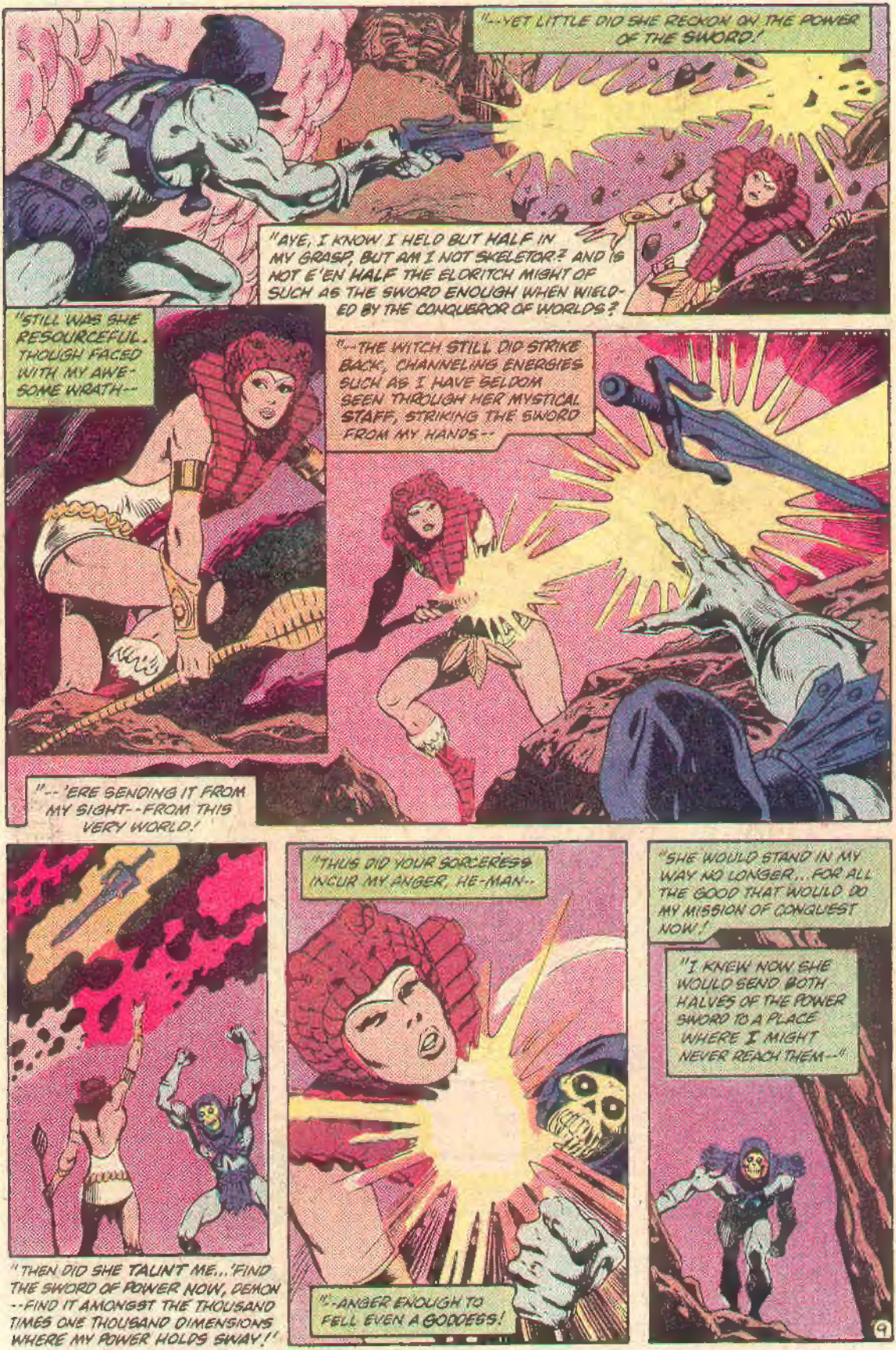
"--YET LITTLE DID SHE RECKON ON THE POWER OF THE SWORD!
"AYE, I KNOW I HELD BUT HALF IN MY GRASP, BUT AM I NOT SKELETOR? AND IS NOT E'EN HALF THE ELDRITCH MIGHT OF SUCH AS THE SWORD ENOUGH WHEN WIELDED BY THE CONQUEROR OF WORLDS?
"STILL WAS SHE RESOURCEFUL, THOUGH FACED WITH MY AWESOME WRATH--
"--THE WITCH STILL DID STRIKE BACK, CHANNELING ENERGIES SUCH AS I HAVE SELDOM SEEN THROUGH HER MYSTICAL STAFF, STRIKING THE SWORD FROM MY HANDS--
"--'ERE SENDING IT FROM MY SIGHT--FROM THIS VERY WORLD!
"THUS DID YOUR SORCERESS INCUR MY ANGER, HE-MAN--
"--ANGER ENOUGH TO FELL EVEN A GODDESS!
"SHE WOULD STAND IN MY WAY NO LONGER... FOR ALL THE GOOD THAT WOULD DO MY MISSION OF CONQUEST NOW!
"I KNEW NOW SHE WOULD SEND BOTH HALVES OF THE POWER SWORD TO A PLACE WHERE I MIGHT NEVER REACH THEM--"
"THEN DID SHE TAUNT ME... 'FIND THE SWORD OF POWER NOW, DEMON --FIND IT AMONGST THE THOUSAND TIMES ONE THOUSAND DIMENSIONS WHERE MY POWER HOLDS SWAY!'"
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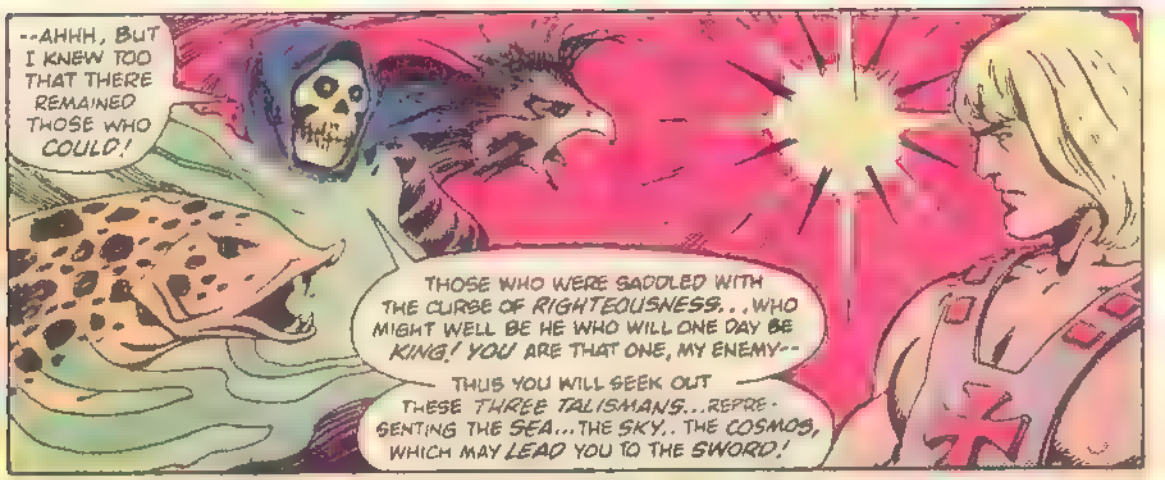
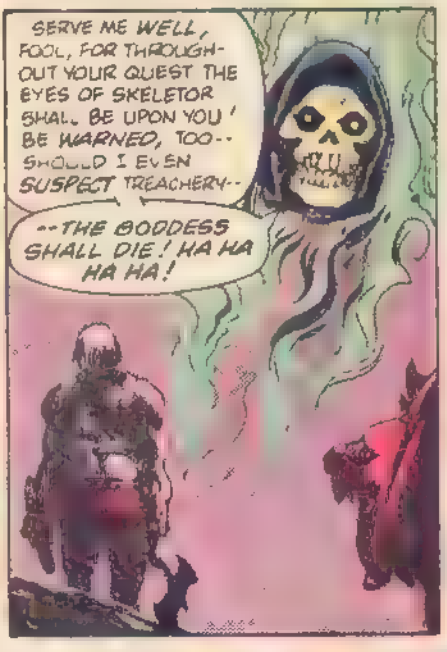
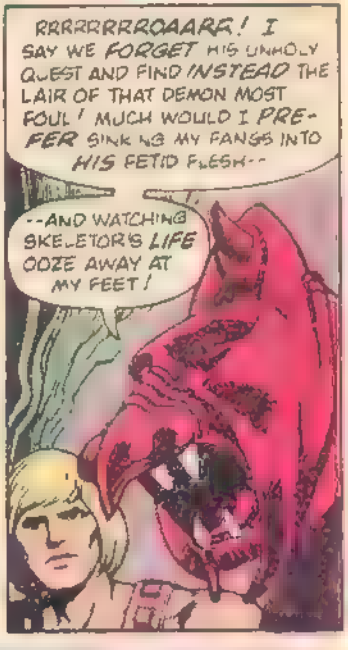

--AHHH, BUT I KNEW TOO THAT THERE REMAINED THOSE WHO COULD!
THOSE WHO WERE SADDLED WITH THE CURSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS...WHO MIGHT WELL BE HE WHO WILL ONE DAY BE KING! YOU ARE THAT ONE, MY ENEMY--
THUS YOU WILL SEEK OUT THESE THREE TALISMANS...REPRESENTING THE SEA...THE SKY...THE COSMOS, WHICH MAY LEAD YOU TO THE SWORD!

SUCH DELICIOUS IRONY, IS IT NOT, HE-MAN.. THAT HE WHO IS HERO OF ETERNIA SHOULD ALSO ACT AS CHAMPION FOR ITS CONQUEST?! HA HA HA!


SERVE ME WELL, FOOL, FOR THROUGHOUT YOUR QUEST THE EYES OF SKELETOR SHALL BE UPON YOU! BE WARNED, TOO-- SHOULD I EVEN SUSPECT TREACHERY--
--THE GODDESS SHALL DIE! HA HA HA HA!


RRRRRRROAARR! I SAY WE FORGET HIS UNHOLY QUEST AND FIND INSTEAD THE LAIR OF THAT DEMON MOST FOUL! MUCH WOULD I PREFER SINKING MY FANGS INTO HIS FETID FLESH--
--AND WATCHING SKELETOR'S LIFE OOZE AWAY AT MY FEET!

NAY, GOOD BATTLE CAT!
THOUGH MY DESIRES MATCH YOUR OWN, IT CANNOT BE! SKELETOR WOULD MAKE GOOD HIS THREATS AGAINST OUR GODDESS SHOULD WE SEEK TO DEFY HIS WISHES--

--AND ONLY THE GODS THEMSELVES KNOW WHAT HER DEMISE COULD MEAN TO THE FATE OF ETERNIA ...AND THE COSMOS!
SO THEY GO FROM THE CAVERN OF POWER TO BEGIN THEIR QUEST--

--WHILST THE FATES THE HERO OF ETERNIA FEARS FOR SO ARE BEING DECEIVED, ELSEWHERE..
SO IT BEGINS.
LONG HAVE THE STARS FORETOLD THE COMING OF THIS EVENT AND SO I HAVE KNOWN OF IT--AS ZODAC KNOWS ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED AND WILL YET HAPPEN THROUGHOUT THE VAST EXPANSES OF THE MULTIVERSE.
YET THOUGH I HAVE KNOWN, STILL I MAY NOT INTERVENE--
--NOT YET!
ONCE MORE HAS SKELETOR SOUGHT TO TAMPER WITH THE FORCES THAT RULE THE UNIVERSE TIPPING THE SCALES IN HIS FAVOR THROUGH THE ABDUCTION OF THE ETERNIAN GODDESS--
--RISKING THE WRATH OF FORCES EVEN HE DOES NOT QUITE COMPREHEND IN THE NAME OF THE CONQUEST OF YET ANOTHER WORLD!
YET HOW MIGHT HE KNOW THE GODDESS'S ROLE ON THE ETERNIAN PLANE IS PIVOTAL AND OH SO VITAL TO THE CONTINUED FLOW OF TIME AND SPACE? SKELETOR IS BUT THE MOST PRIMAL OF BEINGS.
--BORN OF LUST AND HATE, FUELED BY GREED AND MOTIVATED BY DESIRES HE HAS NEVER SOUGHT TO QUESTION NOR MADE ATTEMPT TO CONQUER
SO BE IT. MAYHAPS SKELETOR CAN NO MORE BE BLAMED FOR HIS EVIL ACTIONS THAN NOBLE HE-MAN SHOULD BE HAILED FOR HIS GOOD... 'TIS BUT THEIR NATURES--NO MORE, NO LESS.
BUT SUCH CONSTRAINTS ARE NO CONCERN OF ZODAC'S FOR I AM ABOVE PIDDLING MORTAL CONCERNS. I SIMPLY AM, CHOOSING NO PATH SAVE THAT WHICH THE ALIGNMENT OF THE STARS SHOWS ME--
--AND SO I MUST, AS EVER, WAIT. THE COSMOS SHALL SOON SHOW ME MY PATH IN THIS GRAVE GAME CALLED LIFE AND WHEN IT DOES--
-ZODAC SHALL BE READY!
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MEANWHILE...
MAKE SPEED, GOOD CAT! OUR TIME IS LIMITED, AND I BELIEVE I HAVE SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE FIRST TALISMAN... THE COSMIC STAR CLUSTER.
IF MEMORY SERVES ME, IT CAN BE FOUND WITHIN THE WALLS OF MY FATHER'S CASTLE, IN THE CARE OF OLD TARRAK, THE ROYAL WIZARD.
GRRR! SURELY WE'RE NOT TO BE SERVING THAT FIEND FROM HELL, MY CHAMPION! IF SKELETOR LAYS HANDS ON THE POWER SWORD...
ONE THING AT A TIME, CAT. REMEMBER THE GODDESS MUST BE RESCUED.
AYE. BUT AT WHAT PRICE?
THAT IS THE QUESTION INDEED. BUT WE HAVE TO GAMBLE THAT ONCE WE GATHER THE TALISMANS THREE AND LEAD THE DEMON TO THE TWIN SWORDS, A WAY WILL BE FOUND TO STOP HIM.
HAVE FAITH IN ME, OLD FRIEND. I SHALL NOT ALLOW OUR WORLD TO FALL TO THAT FIEND.
HO! GUARDSMEN! I SEEK ENTRY INTO THE PALACE ROYAL!
HOLD YOUR TIGER, HE-MAN! I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU SLICE UP MY MEN FOR THE DOING OF THEIR DUTY. ALLOW THEM PASSAGE, GUARD--ON MY AUTHORITY!
AS YOU COMMAND, CAPTAIN TEELA!
DO YOU NOW, WARRIOR? AND BY WHOSE AUTHORITY AM I EXPECTED TO GRANT THAT THING?
BY THE STARS! I'VE NO TIME FOR VERBAL SPARRING WITH LACKEYS! STAND ASIDE LEST I
SHORTLY...
WHAT BRINGS THE GREAT ETERNIAN HERO TO THESE WALLS, HE-MAN?
A MISSION OF THE UTMOST URGENCY, CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS--
--THAT REQUIRES I HAVE WORDS AT ONCE WITH THE COURT WIZARD SO...EH?
AHH, I SEE WE'VE A VISITOR THIS DAY, CAPTAIN TEELA. YOU MAY APPROACH US!
GODS! MY MOTHER AND FATHER APPROACH! NEVER BEFORE HAVE I BEEN IN THEIR PRESENCE AS ANY OTHER THAN THEIR CAROUSING SON, ADAM!
12

SAVE FOR MY GARB, WHAT IS THERE TO PREVENT THEIR RECOGNIZING ME AS THE HEIR TO THE THRONE?
WHY SO BASHFUL, HE-MAN? YOUR SOVEREIGNS WISH TO MEET YOU.
EH? OF COURSE
'TIS AN HONOR INDEED, HE-MAN YOUR EXPLOITS AND DEEDS OF BRAVERY IN DEFENSE OF OUR LAND HAVE BEEN SUNG LOUDLY BY MINSTRELS AND TRAVELLERS ALIKE.
Y-YOU FLATTER ME, YOUR HIGHNESSES. TRULY, I DO NO MORE THAN ANY WHO LOVE THEIR KING AND LAND
YOU'RE WELCOME IN OUR HOME ANYTIME, YOUNG MAN.
HA HA! YOU ARE MOST MODEST, MY CHAMPION. FARE YOU WELL!
HOW VERY STRANGE, HUSBAND IN SOME MANNER, THIS HE-MAN SEEMS TO REMIND ME OF OUR OWN SON, ADAM.
SURELY YOU JEST, MARLENA! HE-MAN IS A BOLD ADVENTURER, WHILST OUR SON IS NO MORE THAN A LAZY ROUSTABOUT.
BUT, AHHH. TO HAVE ONE SUCH AS HE-MAN AS MY HEIR RATHER THAN ADAM.
NOW THAT WOULD BE A LEGACY ANY SOVEREIGN WOULD BE PROUD TO LEAVE HIS PEOPLE.
AND THE KING CAN ONLY SIGH HIS SILENT DISAPPOINTMENT--
--AND BE FOREVER DISAPPOINTED WHEN, LATER, HE HEARS THAT THE CHAMPION FOUGHT BENEATH HIS VERY ROOF AND HE WAS NOT THERE TO BEAR WITNESS
THESE ARE THE WIZARD TARRAK'S CHAMBERS, HE-MAN. I.. HUH?
RRRRR! I SMELL TROUBLE WITH.N
TO ARMS, MY CHAMPIONS! 'TWOULD SEEM TROUBLE WERE INDEED AN UNDERSTATEMENT, CAT! IT SOUNDS MORE LIKE--
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"--MAYHEM!"
BACK.. BACK YE FOUL CREATURES OF HELL AND BEYOND! THE WIZARD TARRAK IS NO DEMON'S SUPPER!
OH DEAR ME...NOW WHAT IS THAT SPELL OF DISPLACEMENT I SEEK...?
WORRY NOT ABOUT YOUR SPELLS AND CHARMS, OLD SORCERER! POTENT THOUGH THEY MAY BE AGAINST SUCH DANGERS, THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANYTHING QUITE LIKE THE SHARP EDGE OF BLADE AND AXE TO FELL DEMONS!
BAH! I SAY 'TIS FANG AND CLAW THESE CREATURES FEAR MOST, HE-MAN!
LOOK, LET'S ARGUE THE RELATIVE MERITS OF YOUR TECHNIQUES LATER, YOU GUYS! BUT WHICHEVER YOU USE--GET THEM!

SAGE ADVICE, FRIEND TEELA BETWEEN BLADE, BLASTER AND FANG, WE'LL DRAW MUCH OF THE FETID ICHOR THESE DEMONS CALL BLOOD!
OH, AND WHAT OF MY MAGIC, MUSCLEMAN? WHO DO YOU THINK HELD OFF THESE, .THESE THINGS UNTIL YOUR ARRIVAL?
BY THE MOONS! IS ALL ANYONE HERE CONCERNED WITH TO BE CREDIT FOR THE KILLS? JUST DO IT! WE CAN DIVVY UP THE BODIES LATER!
GRRRRRRRRR... IF THERE ARE ANY LEFT TO COUNT!
URRRET!
, OR IF WE SURVIVE TO COUNT THEM.
THE HEROES FALL SILENT THEN, FOR ALL HAVE BUT ONE THOUGHT NOW IN MIND...SURVIVAL AGAINST ODDS TO CHALLENGE EVEN THESE FIERCE WARRIORS.

BUT THE ODDS, LIKE THE TIDE OF THIS BATTLE ARE SOON TO CHANGE, AS .
HO.! I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN I'D FIND YOU HERE IN THE MIDST OF THE FRAY, HE-MAN! WHENE'ER THERE IS A BATTLE THE MAGNITUDE OF THIS ONE I OVERHEARD FROM WITHOUT--
BWAAM
--YOU ARE THERE!
STILL, I PRAY YOU WON'T TAKE OFFENSE AT AN OLD MAN FOR INTRUDING, YOUNGSTERS, FOR I DO FEEL I'VE SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE--
A FACT THESE HIDEOUS BEASTIES I AM SURE WILL NOT FIND TO THEIR LIKING!
SKREEEK!
MAN-AT-ARMS! FEEL FREE TO JOIN. JUST CHOOSE YOURSELF A DEMON AND SMASH AWAY!
THOCK
HUH! 'TWOULD SEEM THE DEMONS HAVE SUDDENLY LOST THEIR TASTE FOR COMBAT, FRIEND. THEY FLEE!
AYE AND NOT TOO SOON FOR ME
AS WAS YOUR TIMELY APPEARANCE, OLD COMRADE. WORDS DO NOT EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE THAT YOU ARRIVED WITH YOUR SUIT OF WONDROUS WEAPONS TO FIGHT AT OUR SIDE.
YOU KNOW HOW MY FATHER IS, HE-MAN.. NEVER ABLE TO LET A GOOD FIGHT PASS HIM BY!
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AND WHAT OF THE OTHER MEMBER OF THIS FRACAS? ARE YOU WELL, OLD TARRAK?
AS WELL AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, BOY ...CONSIDERING I'VE JUST FENDED OFF DEMONS AND MONSTERS MAYHAPS A SHORT NAP WILL BE OF HELP..
IT WILL BE TIME FOR SLEEP LATER, OLD WIZARD SO, WHAT WENT ON HERE -- ANOTHER OF YOUR SPELLS GONE WRONG?
YOU THINK ME A DOD DERING OLD FOOL, WOMAN--?! OF COURSE NOT! I WAS ATTACKED. THOSE MONSTROSITIES APPEARED AND BEGAN RANSACKING MY SANCTUM
TO WHAT END?
NOW HOW THE DEVIL SHOULD I KNOW, BOY? OUT OF ALL THE MYRIAD POTIONS AND CHARMS WORTH STEALING ALL THEY SEEMED INTERESTED IN WAS A MERE TRINKET...AN ANCIENT TALISMAN IN THE SHAPE OF NEXUS CONSTELLATION.
WHY ANYONE WOULD WASTE THE ENERGY IT TAKES TO CHANT A SPELL FOR THAT IS BEYOND ME
BUT NOT ME, TARRAK THERE'S FAR MORE TO THAT TALISMAN THAN YOU KNOW.. INCLUDING THE LIFE OF A GODDESS!
BLAST THE FATES!
THIS MEANS THERE IS ANOTHER ALSO ON THE TRAIL OF THE TALISMANS AND THE SWORDS
AND THOUGH I MIGHT AT ONCE SUSPECT SKELETOR, I KNOW WELL HE IS NOT THIS TIME INVOLVED.
CALM YOURSELF, HE-MAN. BLEAK THOUGH IT MAY SEEM, AT LEAST WE'VE HAD A TASTE OF COMBAT THIS DAY. ISN'T THAT WORTH SOMETHING?
17

YOU'RE TOO EASILY SWAYED BY THE PLEASURES OF THE MOMENT, CAT. YOU KNOW FULL WELL THE SEVERITY OF THIS.
MAYBE HE DOES, HE-MAN BUT WE DON'T. WOULD YOU MIND FILLING US IN?
FORGIVE ME, CAPTAIN. I FORGOT YOU WERE NOT PRESENT WHEN SKELETOR CAME TO US
FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL MOMENTS, THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER LISTEN TO THE ETERNIAN CHAMPION'S TALE, AND
DEEDRA'S CHAIN! THEN YOU ARE BOUND BY AN OATH TO AID THAT FIEND!
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, HE-MAN?
I CAN DO NAUGHT BUT FULFILL MY PROMISE MAN-AT-ARMS... I MUST GATHER TOGETHER THE THREE TALISMANS AND LEAD SKELETOR TO THE POWER SWORD. YET NOW DO I ALSO HAVE THE BURDEN OF FIGHTING A FOE WHO ALSO SEEKS THE SAME THING-
--AND DOES SO WITHOUT CONCERN FOR THE WELFARE OF THE GODDESS!
I-I DID NOT KNOW, CHAMPION! WOULD THAT I DID, NEVER WOULD THE TALISMAN HAVE LEFT MY POSSESSION
PLEASE I WOULD HELP YOU IN YOUR SEARCH IF I MIGHT JUST SPEAK OUT AND ALL THE MYSTICAL MIGHT OF THE WIZARD TARRAK SHALL BE AT YOUR DISPOSAL!
HE-MAN NODS GRIMLY, FOR THOUGH THE BATTLE IS NEWLY JOINED, HE KNOWS IT WILL BE MOST FIERCE INDEED.

ELSEWHERE:
UPON THE HIGHEST PEAK ON ETERNIA SITS THE PLACE CALLED AVION, THE INACCESSIBLE FORTRESS HOME TO THE WORLD'S BIRD PEOPLE.
NONE MAY APPROACH AVION SAVE THOSE WHO DWELL THERE OR THOSE THEY INVITE AMONG THEIR MIDST.
THE PEOPLE OF AVION LIVE IN PEACE AND SECURITY, SURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THEIR WALLS CAN NEVER BE BREACHED.
THUS DO THOSE, LIKE THEIR LEADER STRATOS, FLY FREE THROUGH THE DEEP BLUE OF THE ETERNIAN SKIES, FEARFUL OF NOTHING--
--AND OH SO HAPPY IN THEIR SERENITY UP HIGH...
HO, MY PEOPLE! WE RETURN FROM OUR HUNT WITH MUCH FOOD FOR THE COMING COLO!
ALL HAIL STRATOS!
WELCOME BACK MIGHTY HUNTERS!
WE HAVE MISSED YOU, STRATOS IT IS GOOD TO HAVE YOU HOME, HUSBAND.
YES, WIFE I'VE BEEN LONESOME FOR THE HALLOWED HEIGHTS OF AV ON THESE PAST DAYS.
SUDDENLY, THE CALM IS RENT BY A MIGHTY BURST OF POWER AND THE FOUL STENCH OF BRIMSTONE, AND THAT WHICH THE INHABITANTS OF AVION THOUGHT IMPOSSIBLE COMES TO PASS..
BWAMP!
BY THE FEATHERED GODS...WE ARE ATTACKED!
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THE ATTACK IS SWIFT AND WITHOUT MERCY, FOR THESE ARE BEASTMEN, FEROCIOUS CREATURES OF THE ETERNIAN LOWLAND WHO ARE NEITHER, IN TRUTH, MAN NOR BEAST--
--RATHER A HELLISH MATING OF BOTH THINGS--
--BEINGS WHICH RELISH DEATH AND BATTLE AS THEIR GODS--
--GODS THEY WORSHIP WITH A PASSION!
WAK!
THERE--THAT IS THE ONE WE SEEK!
ME...?
I DON'T KNOW WHY THESE HELLSPAWN COME FOR ME HERE, YET IT SEEMS THEY WOULD AS SOON SEE MY PEOPLE EXTERMINATED AS NOT TO REACH ME.
WE ARE UNPREPARED FOR SUCH AN ATTACK--
20

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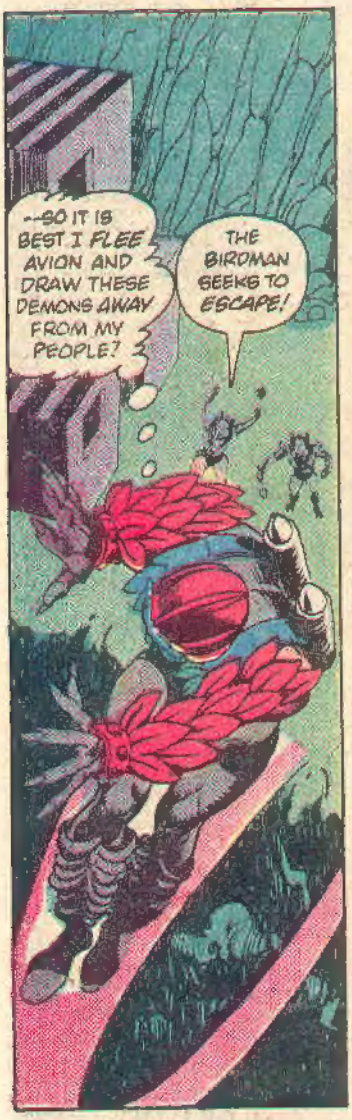
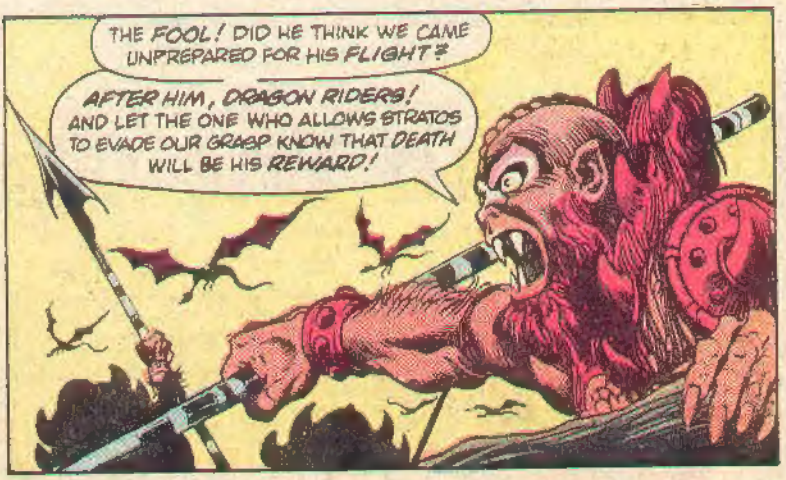
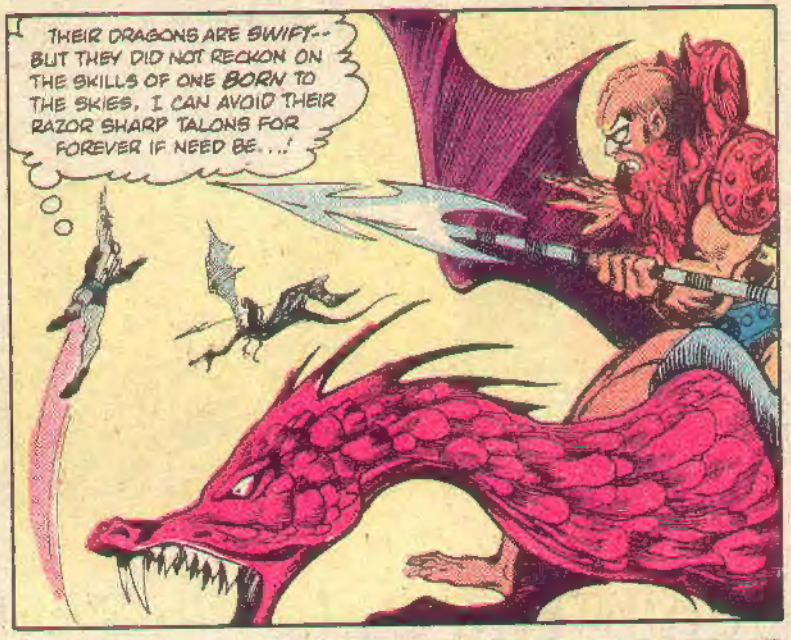
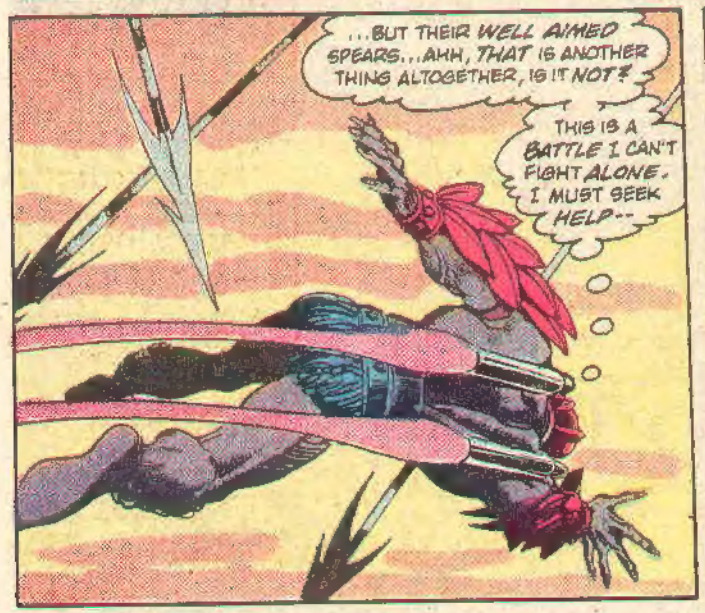
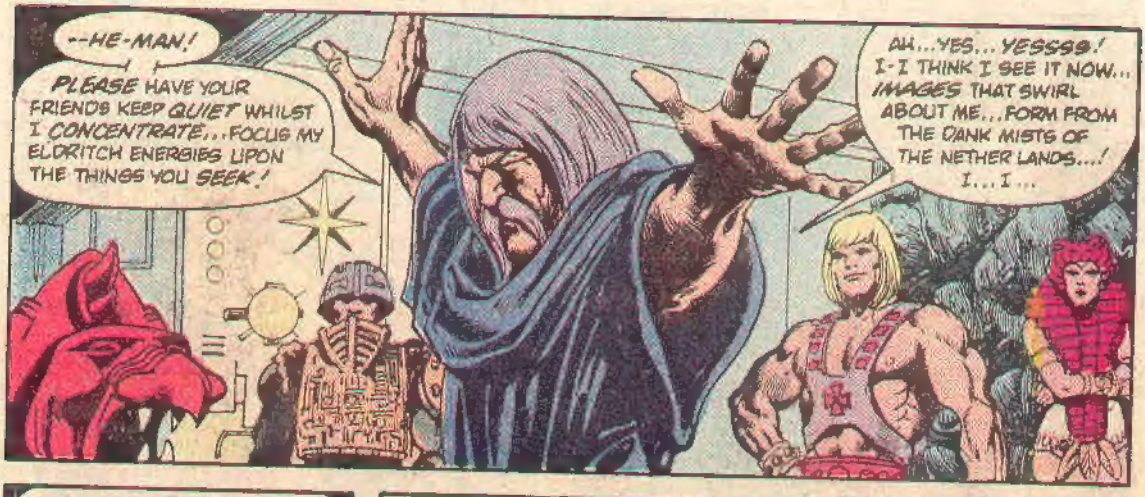

--SO IT IS BEST I FLEE AVION AND DRAW THESE DEMONS AWAY FROM MY PEOPLE!
THE BIRDMAN SEEKS TO ESCAPE!


THE FOOL! DID HE THINK WE CAME UNPREPARED FOR HIS FLIGHT?
AFTER HIM, DRAGON RIDERS! AND LET THE ONE WHO ALLOWS STRATOS TO EVADE OUR GRASP KNOW THAT DEATH WILL BE HIS REWARD!


THEIR DRAGONS ARE SWIFT-- BUT THEY DID NOT RECKON ON THE SKILLS OF ONE BORN TO THE SKIES, I CAN AVOID THEIR RAZOR SHARP TALONS FOR FOREVER IF NEED BE...!

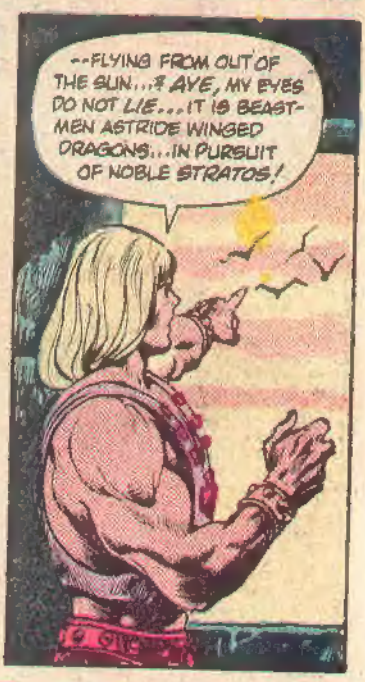

...BUT THEIR WELL AIMED SPEARS...AHH, THAT IS ANOTHER THING ALTOGETHER, IS IT NOT?
THIS IS A BATTLE I CAN'T FIGHT ALONE. I MUST SEEK HELP--

--AND THERE IS BUT ONE MAN ON ALL OF ETERNIA WHO COULD GIVE ME THE ASSISTANCE I NEED NOW--

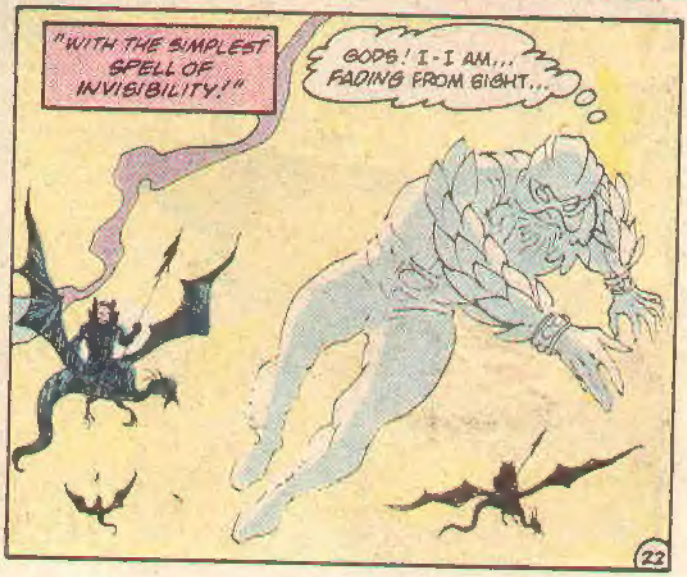

--HE-MAN!
PLEASE HAVE YOUR FRIENDS KEEP QUIET WHILST I CONCENTRATE...FOCUS MY ELDRITCH ENERGIES UPON THE THINGS YOU SEEK!
AH...YES...YESSSS! I-I THINK I SEE IT NOW... IMAGES THAT SWIRL ABOUT ME...FORM FROM THE DANK MISTS OF THE NETHER LANDS...! I...I...

...I...CAN NOT. DAMNATION! SOMETHING DOES BLOCK MY ATTEMPTS TO SEE INTO THE OTHERWORLDLY PLANES.
THERE IS SOME GRAVE DISTURBANCE THERE, MY FRIENDS--YET 'TIS TOO MUCH FOR AN OLD WIZARD TO BATTLE. I AM...SORRY...

DON'T BLAME YOURSELF, WIZARD. YOU HAVE DONE ALL YOU COULD.
YET, CAN IT BE SO? ARE WE TRULY STOPPED IN OUR TRACKS 'ERE OUR QUEST EVEN BEGINS?
EH--? WHAT'S THIS I SEE--


--FLYING FROM OUT OF THE SUN...? AYE, MY EYES DO NOT LIE...IT IS BEAST-MEN ASTRIDE WINGED DRAGONS...IN PURSUIT OF NOBLE STRATOS!

WE MAY NOT REACH THEM FROM THE GROUND...YET MAYHAPS YOUR MAGICS WILL ALSO FAIL THIS!
NAY, HE-MAN! THOUGH I MAY NOT BATTLE THE UN-KNOWN IN OTHER REALMS, STILL ARE MY POWERS SUFFICIENT TO SHIELD YOUR FRIEND FROM HARM--


"WITH THE SIMPLEST SPELL OF INVISIBILITY!"
GODS! I-I AM... FADING FROM SIGHT...

GRRR! WH-WHERE HAS HE GONE..?
'TIS A TRICK. THE WINGED FOOL COULD NOT HAVE SIMPLY VANISHED BEFORE OUR VERY EYES! STRATOS MUST BE NEARBY!
AND BY ALL THAT IS UNHOLY, WE SHALL FIND HIM...OR PERISH IN THE TRYING! ONWARD, MY BEASTLY COMPANIONS!
M-MY THANKS, HE-MAN! I DO NOT KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER I COULD HAVE REMAINED ALOFT.
IT WAS NOT MY DOING, STRATOS--BUT I AM GLAD TO SEE YOU WELL, OLD FRIEND.
I'LL BE FINE--AS SOON AS I CATCH MY BREATH...
STRATOS... THAT CHARM ABOUT YOUR NECK--
--'TIS THE SIGN OF THE BIRD..THE TALISMAN WE SEEK!
, AN INCREDIBLE STROKE OF LUCK THAT STRATOS CAME TO US, ISN'T IT, HE-MAN?
NOT LUCK, TEELA--FATE!
NO LONGER ARE WE STYMIED, MY FRIENDS, FOR AT LEAST ONE PART OF THE PUZZLE WE SEEK IS IN OUR HANDS AND WITH IT--
--WE SHALL GO ON TO VICTORY!
NEXT ISSUE: "THE KEY TO CASTLE GRAYSKULL!"